

or the full Metro Council should manage the proposed public transportation system were it approved.

To "Forward Lust"...

Altogether, the Forward Thrust bonds totalled \$815.2 million, and this translated into a hefty tax bite for property owners. For the typical home owner living in a house valued at \$20,000 in 1968 dollars, the average annual levy ranged from \$7 for a King County resident outside Metro's boundaries to nearly \$16 for a non-Seattleite inside Metro, and peaked at just shy of \$21 for a Seattle resident who bore the costs of all three jurisdictions' improvements. The levies would vary over time and were projected to peak at \$14.77, \$33.65, and \$45.79 in the respective jurisdictions in 1978. The bonds were to be paid off by 1980, with the exception of rapid transit which finished up in 1985.

A small army of 3,000 volunteers was mobilized to sell the 13 ballot issues of Forward Thrust. Recruits came from the Muni League, League of Women Voters, Allied Arts, and some 150 other civic groups large and small. Major employers proselytized their workers and Pacific Northwest Bell mailed Forward Thrust propaganda with phone bills. Despite such resources, the campaign had a steep climb ahead since each Forward Thrust proposition required a 60 percent supermajority to pass, with the exception of the transit management referendum. Fortunately, public opinion research conducted in the fall of 1967 indicated that the political wind was at their back.

The wind began to change as Forward Thrust neared the February 13, 1968, election. The usual opponents surfaced again, but with fresh vehemence. The King County Democratic Party lashed out with shocking ferocity in an article headlined, "Government by the Elite?????" It derided "Forward Lust" as a scheme to enrich Jim Ellis and his law firm through millions in bond transactions. After a storm of protest, party chair (and future Seattle Councilmember and Metro champion) Jeanette Williams apologized for the allegation of a conflict of interest.

Ed Donohoe, the crusty editor of the Teamster Union's influential state newspaper, revived the charge and railed against trains he claimed "won't be rapid, won't haul the people they claim... won't pay their way and they're no damned good for the north end, the south end or east end." (This opinion was not shared by most of organized labor, it should be noted.) The transit plan also

drew fire from right wingers who sniffed "socialism" creeping down the tracks and property owners who feared a "Forward Bust" for their own fortunes.

The best funded opponents were "Citizens for Sensible Transit" led by Seattle real estate broker Vick Gould and conservative Spokane State Senator Sam Guess. CST published expensive newspaper ads warning voters, "Don't be railroaded!" It scored a tactical victory late in the campaign when it protested Forward Thrust's near unanimous editorial support and filed a "fairness" complaint with the Federal Communications Commission. Several stations provided Thrust opponents "equal time" for their commercials just before the election. CST's ample funding and adroit maneuvers led some transit advocates to suspect that automobile manufacturers and the tax-shy Boeing Company were secretly at the wheel, but the lack of public disclosure of campaign contributions at the time makes this impossible to verify.

Despite the anti-transit clamor and a January poll which showed that transit bonds had slipped from a 64 percent approval to only 51 percent, Forward Thrust supporters were confident of victory. Indeed, they were too confident and focused their last-minute campaigning to boost the flagging stadium bonds, not transit. Then, in a text book case of political miscalculation, they concentrated a huge "get out the vote" effort in the precincts with the highest usual turnout without regard to their demographics or voting histories in approving special levies and bond issues. This obviated the original advantage of a special election, which normally tended to be dominated by more affluent and better informed voters inclined to favor taxing themselves for civic improvements.

The "success" of Forward Thrust's campaigners was borne out on February 13 when nearly 268,000 voters went to the polls, 100,000 more voters than had been expected and 50,000 more than had voted in the previous year's general election! It was not a stampede against Forward Thrust, however. Four County bonds passed for the Youth Service Center, future Kingdome, arterial highways and parks. Seattle voters approved bonds for neighborhood improvements, sewers and fire protection. The four other bond issues which failed came within one or two percentage points of validation, but the center could not hold: rapid transit mustered a bare majority of 51 percent, far short of the 60 percent it needed.

Why did voters single out rapid transit? Clearly, it faced the highest threshold. At \$385 million, transit represented nearly half of the local cost of the total Forward Thrust program. Not only did transit present a big target for opponents, it gave even "progressive" voters an easy way

out. In the privacy of the voting booth, they could take the leap with most of Forward Thrust without taking the plunge into twice as much debt with transit. Thus, packaging rapid transit with the rest of Forward Thrust may have been a fatal error from the outset.

Robert Gogerty, a future Seattle deputy mayor and now a public affairs consultant, conducted a detailed autopsy of the vote immediately after the election. His analysis showed that Forward Thrust's huge canvassing effort had inadvertently mobilized thousands of hostile voters who might otherwise have stayed home. High turnouts in tax-wary working class districts in Ballard and West Seattle proved disastrous for rapid transit.

Follow up polling showed that 24 percent of those voters who rejected rapid transit thought it was "necessary" but not necessarily "the long term solution" to transportation problems. This was crucial because Forward Thrust gave such voters a fallback option, the arterial highway bonds (which had been added chiefly as a sop for the Auto Club and suburbs, and passed by 62 percent). Gogerty concluded that "voters perceived transit and highways as apples and apples," and since the latter cost only one fourth as much as rapid transit, the final choice was obvious.

...To "Boeing Bust"

Forward Thrust backers put the brightest face they could on the election's mixed results, and vowed to return for one more try to win approval for rail transit as soon as possible. Jim Ellis and transit boosters were propelled by a sense of impending disaster. King County was losing the race with its own growth, and the prophecy of sprawl expressed in the PSRTS study was quickly being fulfilled. Indeed, between 1960 and 1970, Seattle's population actually shrank by 5 percent to 531,000, while the balance of the county ballooned an astounding 67 percent to 626,000.

Meanwhile, almost without fanfare or opposition, King County voters scrapped their 114 year old Board of Commissioners. On November 5, 1968, voters adopted a new charter creating an elected County Executive and a nine member County Council elected by districts (and, significantly, by party). The work begun back in 1952 to modernize County Government was finally completed 16 years later, but Jim Ellis and his allies now had other priorities.

Forward Thrust's "Committee of 200" was expanded by half and a detailed program of attitudinal research was conducted in the fall of 1968. Transit backers returned to Olympia and

lobbied successfully for the right to levy a 1 percent motor vehicle excise tax to match local transit funds and for Metro's ability to levy household utility taxes. De Leuw Cather explored four options for a metropolitan transit system: three all bus systems and a revised form of the original rail-bus scheme. The all-bus schemes were rejected as too labor intensive, with payroll representing 80 percent of system costs, which left rail as the preferred alternative.

A group of Boeing engineers suggested a fifth option employing lighter trains and less tunneling and grade separation to reduce costs, but this was rejected as too "unconventional." Experts at the University of Washington, notably demographer Jerry Schneider and engineer Ed Horwood, also challenged Forward Thrust's preoccupation with serving downtown Seattle since most real growth was happening in the suburbs. They favored a plan which implemented the polycentric vision of King County's 1964 Comprehensive Plan.

These new ideas and criticisms were not welcomed by Forward Thrust, and its resistance to alternatives was understandable. In the wake of the first election, De Leuw Cather's project chief, Israel Gilboa, reported that the detailed design for the first, North Seattle phase of the rail system was already "half finished." On paper at least, the train had already left the station.

It is no wonder, then, that the recommended plan varied little from the 1968 version. Trackage was increased slightly from 47 miles to 49 while future right of way purchases were slashed from 24 miles to eight. Two transit stations were added and bus routes were expanded from 500 miles to 740, including an exclusive "busway" to serve West Seattle. More detail was provided for the operation of the initial all bus system while rail was under construction and 800 bus shelters were added to the plan. The budget included purchase of 300 rail vehicles and 500 new, low pollution buses. The total cost estimate rose to \$1.321 billion and the local bond share increased to \$440 million. Significantly, Senator Magnuson personally ensured that the federal match was ready and waiting on local voter approval.

As in 1968, transit was packaged with other community improvements: \$80 million for storm water control, \$55.3 million for new community centers, and \$40.2 million for a new County jail and police and public health facilities. The \$615.5 million package picked up an unwelcome hitchhiker on the way to the May 19, 1970, ballot when a referendum compelled a review of plans to locate the new King County Stadium at Seattle Center.

The opposition to Forward Thrust was led by future County Assessor Harley Hoppe as

head of "Overtaxed, Inc." He did not have to work very hard. Between the 1968 and 1970 elections, the international aerospace industry took a nosedive, and Puget Sound employment plummeted with it. Loss of airliner sales and Congress' cancellation of the supersonic transport project compelled Boeing to lay off 65,000 workers between January 1970 and December 1971. As the multiplier effects of the "Boeing Bust" rippled through the local economy, Washington State's unemployment rate crested at 12 percent, twice the national average.

The worst was still ahead on May 19, 1970, but it was already bad enough. Fear of growth had motivated Forward Thrust, but now the prospect of regional collapse threatened to derail it. The change in Seattle's fortunes was so swift, Forward Thrust advocates could not shift their arguments quickly enough to stress the job creating benefits of an infusion of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal matching funds. Local taxpayers saw a huge new assessment at a moment when they did not know if they would have jobs the day after election.

All four Forward Thrust bond issues went down. Only the health and safety bonds cracked 50 percent, and transit fell the hardest with a yes vote of barely 46 percent. The people also blocked location of the new stadium at Seattle Center, which, ironically, was probably a comment on the hopeless traffic congestion in the "Mercer Mess."

No attempt was made to strike brave poses in the wake of this crushing defeat. Jim Ellis declared that the Forward Thrust was spent and would be disbanded. "It is never good for a city or an individual to look back," he told the Seattle P-I's Mike Conant. "If rapid transit is to have a new beginning it will have to come from people other than the Forward Thrust Committee." Seattle's new mayor, Wes Uhlman, was "extremely disappointed" by the transit defeat and added, "We have got to take a whole new look at where we are and where we're headed." King County's first elected Executive, John Spellman, expressed unconvincing optimism that the defeat was only a "temporary delay."

Some local realtors summed up Seattle's mood when they posted a billboard sign asking, "Will the last person leaving Seattle please turn off the lights?" If you had told anyone at the time that Metro would be running a county wide transit system in just two years, they would have asked you, in the vernacular of the era, what are you smoking?

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

The federal funds reserved for Forward Thrust were reallocated to Atlanta which promptly went to work on its "MARTA" system. It was the unkindest cut of all. As one wag put it at the time, "Seattle's always been called a provincial town. Now it's gone and proved it."

What went wrong? Why had the concerted efforts of the region's best and brightest failed to win approval for a rapid transit system?

First, it must be recognized that Washington's State Constitution imposed a daunting hurdle. Its 17th Amendment requires a 60 percent majority in a popular vote to raise property taxes above 40 mills. This barrier, unique in the nation, is a relic of Depression jitters. After the 1968 Forward Thrust election, in which every element received a simple majority, The Seattle Times' Herb Robinson blasted the supermajority as an "anachronism." It is also a political sacred cow which would require a state-wide vote to kill, and thus can look forward to a long life.

Second, consensus among Seattle's civic and economic elites does not automatically translate into popular consent. Indeed, there is a long history of public hostility to grand schemes "hatched over lunch at the Rainier Club," no matter the intrinsic merit of plans for, say, the World's Fair, Metro or Forward Thrust. Such resistance is a vestige of Seattle's radical past and reflects an innate contrariness which usually slows "progress" but seldom halts it.

Related to the above, the Seattle electorate has displayed an historical ambivalence about planning since it rejected Virgil Bogue's plan in 1911. Seattle citizens love the act of planning but they are reticent about submitting to the discipline of following a plan. For all of this, this area's taxpayers are remarkably generous and selfless when it comes to funding specific projects which offer tangible community benefit.

Which brings us to the third key point: the "sale" on rapid transit was not closed prior to the 1958, 1962, 1968 and 1970 elections. Automobiles and highways constituted "modern" transportation in the public mind, and problems of congestion and delay had not grown bad enough to compel serious consideration of an alternative. One analyst of the first Forward Thrust election noted that a week of unseasonably dry weather had created optimum driving conditions on King County's roads and highways just as voters were going to the polls. So much for the empirical evidence of gridlock.

Fourth, there is a fundamental prejudice against "public transportation" in the minds of

many. Transit is something other people use. The popular transportation ideal is a new car and an open road, not a crowded bus or streetcar. Remember how enthusiastically Seattle scrapped its street railway in 1940; many people did not perceive a return to such technology as a step "forward."

Fifth, and most important, there were honest disagreements about the utility and economic efficiency of rail transit which could not be silenced or papered over through bureaucratic infighting. Seattle and its environs were distinguished by extremely low densities which made fixed route rail transit a dubious proposition unless and until residential patterns changed.

This did not trouble transit advocates since they saw rail as a means to the end of engineering greater density and protecting open space in the future. For them, transit was perhaps even more important as a vehicle for land use planning than it was as a system for carrying people from point A to B. To less visionary planners, elected officials and taxpayers who focused on the transportation needs of the present, rail transit did not make enough sense for the dollars it demanded.

The transit debate also pitted urban interests against the suburbs, and the latter's elected officials increasingly resented the implication that they were somehow inferior to their big city cousins. During the 1950s and 1960s, Seattle's larger population gave it the leverage to dominate regional planning, but by 1970 the balance had begun to shift in favor of the County and suburban cities. Seattle's hegemony would come under ever greater attack.

This subtext of land use versus transit use continues to shape the politics of public transportation and governmental reform in metropolitan Seattle. The argument is often couched in euphemisms of technology, economy, jurisdictional scale, professionalism and accountability, but the adequacy of political mechanisms for controlling regional growth remains the real issue.

As the 1970's began, however, such abstractions had to take a back seat to a more immediate crisis: Seattle and King County's existing public transportation system, such as it was, faced imminent and total collapse.

Routes

Part III: Rubber Wheels

The Triumph of Metro Transit, 1970 to 1980

Transit advocates did not have the leisure to lick their wounds following the defeat of the second Forward Thrust transit plan. Existing bus services in Seattle and the suburbs were rapidly disintegrating and it was clear that what little transit service King County enjoyed would disappear if action were not taken immediately.

This prospect imposed a new pragmatism on transit planning. Grand visions of rapid rail trains were put aside and the debate over land use was tabled in order to address the impending emergency. A truce of sorts took effect in the old feuds among jurisdictions and between government and citizen groups so that a new transit system could be designed from the ground up.

The resulting effort was perhaps the single greatest instance of public participation and cooperation yet witnessed in King County.

Running on Empty

Following the scrapping of the streetcars, Seattle Transit's ridership experienced a dramatic increase from 53 million fares in 1939 to nearly 57 million in 1942. By that year, the wisdom of replacing rail with "rubber wheels" seemed to have been vindicated as Lloyd Graber succeeded Marmion Mills as Seattle Transit's general manager. This was less a result of the popularity of new trackless trolleys and buses, however, than it was a symptom intensifying war production as Seattle began turning out B-17 bombers and navy vessels for "Lend-Lease" to embattled Great Britain. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, gasoline rationing and the influx of new workers more than doubled transit ridership and reached a record 130 million passenger trips in 1944. The demand compelled Seattle to supplement its trackless trolleys with 54 motor buses leased from the federal government.

The end of World War II and the return of cheap gas cut transit patronage to 75 million trips by 1951, but revenues were sufficient to pay off the original federal RFC loan the following

year and to add 72 new trolleys to the system. The system's largest union, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 587, was able to win major concessions during this period, including paid vacations and the first driver wages in the nation to break \$2 an hour. Unfortunately, fare box revenues continued to decline, and in 1955, the new Seattle Transit Commission had to ask for its first subsidy out of the City's general fund.

The following year, relations between Seattle Transit and ATU turned sour. At Mayor Gordon Clinton's urging, STS offered drivers a pay increase of six cents an hour, which union members found insulting. Despite the system's obvious financial difficulties, ATU insisted that the system should tap a \$2.8 million reserve account to fund healthier raises. The membership voted to strike and shut down the system on November 23, 1956, just as the Christmas shopping season was about to begin. The City won an injunction declaring public employee strikes illegal, which was upheld by the State Supreme Court in a rare Saturday session. The strikers grudgingly returned to work 10 days after they had walked out. It was a bitter holiday for all involved, but the ATU achieved most of its original goals in a new contract two years later.

Meanwhile, annual ridership continued to slump and totalled only 40 million passengers by 1963. To cut costs and spur patronage, the Transit Commission proposed to scrap the trackless trolleys and convert to all-bus operations. Seattle ordered 100 "Flxible" motor buses that year and began to phase out the trolleys.

This sparked the "Committee for Modernization of Electric Transit," or "COMET," to circulate an initiative to save the trolleys. With issues of energy efficiency and air pollution at stake, COMET could claim the distinction of being Seattle's first environmental cause, but the initiative failed at the polls on March 10, 1964, by a vote of 106,000 to 59,000.

Economics accomplished what COMET could not as fares continued to shrink to 33 million by the end of the decade. This slowed the trolley conversion and increased the system's need for an annual subsidy from the city's general fund. The City Council responded in August 1969 by imposing a "transit tax" of one dollar per household, which prompted a referendum on the November ballot. The tax was repealed by a vote of 76,000 to 59,000.

Dorm Braman stepped down as Seattle mayor in early 1969 to become an UMTA administrator in the new Nixon Administration, and former State Senator Wes Uhlman won the right to succeed him that November. Facing the need to subsidize the ailing transit system,

Uhlman joined with City Council in imposing a 50-cent household tax in April 1970. It survived a legal challenge, and helped to generate \$2.5 million in annual matching funds from the State.

Uhlman also sought federal funds to modernize Seattle Transit. He won an UMTA demonstration grant to try out an express service dubbed "Blue Streak." A handful of buses was assigned during peak hours to shuttle commuters between Downtown Seattle and a special parking lot near the Northgate shopping center via the I-5 Express Lanes.

Inaugurated on September 8, 1970, Blue Streak was the region's first experiment with a "park and ride" lot and "high occupancy vehicle" routing on the freeway. It was an instant success: ridership quickly overflowed the 500 parking spaces available at Northgate (much to the consternation of nearby residents), and the service was credited with removing 1,200 automobiles from the daily commute. Jim Patrick, who now serves in Metro, is credited with the original idea.

Despite, or because of, such innovations, Uhlman rankled transit traditionalists such as Lloyd Graber who valued punctuality and discipline over marketing and political considerations. Charles "Chuck" Collins, who would become the second director of Metro Transit, says of Lloyd Graber, "Given his limitations, he was a spectacular manager. If a bus had a scratch on it, he wouldn't send it out. He imbued system with remarkable spirit and insight."

After 28 years of unassailed autonomy, however, Graber was unaccustomed to taking orders from a mayor. Uhlman targeted the Transit Commission for reform, and Seattle voters voted 87,000 to 48,000 on November 3, 1970, to replace the Transit Commission with a new city department accountable to the mayor. Lloyd Graber took his cue to retire to the barn and Deputy Mayor Robert Lavoie took over the new Transit Department.

The trolley issue survived the demise of the Transit Commission, and Uhlman pressed plans to scrap the remaining electric routes in order to save money. This set up a classic battle between engineers and environmentalists, who consistently sided with the trolleys, and transit planners and "bean counters" (budget analysts, if you prefer) who championed diesel. A 1971 face-off, superficially very unfair, pitted a 1940-vintage Twin Coach trolley against a brand new GM V-8 Diesel bus. They vied for speed, reliability and efficiency on various routes and to everyone's amazement, except the experts', the antique trolley held its own in performance and economy (if you factored the cost of wire maintenance out of the formula). A total of 56 operating trolleys lived to see another day.

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With Lavoie at the wheel, Seattle Transit undertook a number of innovations to boost patronage and efficiency: it reduced fares for senior citizens to a dime, expanded services to the University of Washington, instituted a "Fun Run!" shuttle in the central business district, consolidated routes, and installed two-way radios on buses. These improvements slowed the erosion in ridership from but did not reverse it. In 1972, the system's last year, Seattle Transit carried barely 29.2 million passengers, whose fares contributed only \$9.1 million toward operating costs totaling \$14.6 million. This left a deficit of \$5.5 million to be covered by grants and loans.

For all of Seattle Transit's troubles, it was a model system compared to the services available in the rest of King County. Rural and inter-suburban transit deteriorated dramatically in the 20 years following the break-up of Puget Power's "natural monopoly." A number of "mom and pop" bus systems tried to fill the vacuum in the suburbs, but ridership fell by half during the 1950s to 1.6 million fares in 1961.

By the end of decade, it was estimated that fewer than 4,000 non-Seattle residents of King County commuted by bus. Seattle Transit's refusal to permit suburban buses to transport passengers between its stops within the city limits certainly did not promote development of a regional system. Many Seattle passengers were also frustrated as empty buses roared past them to and from the suburbs.

Despite these impediments to efficiency and profitability, one company, the Metropolitan Transit Corporation, gobbled up King County's smaller systems during the 1960s. It was unable to capitalize significant improvements in county-wide services, which led some to suspect that the acquisitions were motivated chiefly by the prospect of a government buy-out down the road.

If Metropolitan's owners were gambling on Forward Thrust, they obviously miscalculated. By 1970, King County Government was compelled to contract with Metropolitan to keep a ragtag fleet of 50 or so aging coaches running in the suburbs. The County also subsidized a solitary bus to serve the residents of Vashon Island.

Public transit in King County and Seattle was clearly running out of gas. It was time to go back to the voters for a fill-up.

Once More Unto the Breach

A dramatic change took place in public attitudes between the second failure of Forward Thrust and the spring of 1972. The nascent environmental movement, formally germinated on Earth Day 1970, had blossomed into a powerful political force, and community councils sprang up in Seattle neighborhoods to oppose the numerous freeways planned for their backyards.

Notable movements included Citizens Against R.H. Thomson (CARHT), spearheaded by Montlake Community Council president Maynard Arsove. Named in honor of the Seattle engineer who flattened Denny Hill, the R.H. Thomson Expressway was seen as promising to do the same to much of the University District, Arboretum and Central Area. An equal if not greater threat was posed by the westward march of Interstate 90, which had swelled under the pressure of suburban growth into a 14-lane juggernaut (plus another four lanes for U.S. 10) that threatened to bury most of Mercer Island and Central Seattle in concrete. Citizen groups also frowned on plans for a Bay Freeway viaduct to cure the Mercer Mess around Seattle Center and a proposal for a high-level bridge to West Seattle.

CARHT found natural allies with the opponents to I-90, led by Margaret Tunks, and they and other neighborhood groups formed a powerful united front with environmentalists, progressives, social activists, and urban preservationists of the Washington Environmental Council, Choose an Effective City Council (CHECC), the Central Seattle Community Council Federation, and Allied Arts of Seattle. These groups expressly demanded that the City develop mass transit as an alternative to more freeways, and they were unified by a new philosophy of governance which promoted direct "citizen participation" in the decisions which affected social and geographical constituencies.

These new movements quickly altered Seattle's political landscape, sweeping out veteran officials and replacing them with progressive reformers such as Phyllis Lamphere, Tim Hill, Bruce Chapman, and John Miller. Mayor Wes Uhlman articulated many of the same themes in his 1969 campaign, although his economic conservatism led him to part company with urban activists on key issues such as I-90 and the Bay Freeway.

Notwithstanding such differences, a new paradigm of urban planning and politics took root in Seattle in the shadow of the Boeing Bust. In the process, public transit suddenly gained a new respectability. This attitude and supportive land use policies were later codified as formal

municipal policy when the Seattle City Council adopted the citizen-directed Seattle 2000 Commission Goals in 1973.

The change in public temper emboldened Jim Ellis and his colleagues to make one more try at putting Metro in the driver's seat for public transit, but they knew that the methods and models of Forward Thrust were now obsolete. They also resolved not to try to clear the hurdle of the 60 percent supermajority required for a bond issue.

Avoiding a levy meant reliance on buses rather than a capital-intensive rail system. Republican State Senator Joel Pritchard (who since served five terms in Congress and is now Lieutenant Governor) and Democratic State Representative David Sprague co-chaired a special committee to explore alternatives for funding such a system. Pritchard credits Jim Ellis for the "brilliant" idea of using a local option sales tax, which would require only a simple majority of voters to approve.

This required a trip back to Olympia, where Metro's welcome was wearing thin. David Sprague recalls that other cities had previously opposed Metro's bids for state funding fearing that Seattle would drain highway funds they needed for their own roads. The legislature authorized a one-percent motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) in 1969 only after granting the same power to other large cities and counties for their own transit systems and "crediting it against" (deducting it) from the total MVET collected and due localities. The MVET revenue also had to be matched dollar for dollar by other local expenditures.

Pritchard and Sprague returned to the 1971 legislative session to fight for Metro's right to ask voters to approve up to three-tenths of a percent sales tax for transit (this limit was raised to six-tenths of a percent by the 1980 Legislature). They also sought companion legislation to make Metro's boundaries coterminous with King County without a further vote of the people and to permit the Metro Council to administer transit directly unless it chose to seek voter approval for a seven-member Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

Aubrey Davis, then a member of the Mercer Island City Council and later chair of Metro's Transit Committee, helped with the lobbying. "We formed a compact. If we could get the sales tax, the state would match it with MVET automatically without an appropriation," Davis explains. "But I don't think they thought we really could pass a local sales tax." (Remember that the 1970 Forward Thrust bonds failed to achieve even a simple majority.) As it was, Metro again had to call

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on Senate leader Bob Greive and his considerable leverage in behalf of the two bills, which passed by a single vote on the last day of the session in May 1971. That same month, the Metro Council formally expanded from 21 members to 36 through the seating of the entire King County Council and its appointed representatives for unincorporated areas.

While Metro was lobbying in Olympia, it also laid the foundation for a new planning process in King County. It turned to the Puget Sound Governmental Conference for aid. PSGC was then at the height of its powers, thanks in part to President Nixon's "New Federalism" which granted regional planning bodies generous funding and the power of "A-95" reviews of local applications for federal aid. The Conference's new director, Mart Kask, was determined to bring order to the raucous region through mass transit linked with binding land use controls.

PSGC had provided a refuge (and salary) for Metro's fledgling "Transit Planning Staff" since the second Forward Thrust defeat. This consisted of Larry Coffman, who had put down his reporter's pen in 1968 to the first paid employee of Metro's Transit Unit. At Metro's urging, PSGC obtained \$447,000 grant from UMTA to hire a planning consultant.

Rail champions such as DeLeuw Cather were not encouraged to apply for this task, and the firm of Daniel, Mann, Johnson and Mendenhall was retained with the express charge of developing an all-bus system. In this decision, local frustration with past failures merged with a new federal policy actively discouraging cities from developing rail systems. Whether buses constituted an interim or a permanent vehicle for mass transit would later become a point of contention between Metro and rail advocates at PSGC, but for the moment, all sides recognized that existing services had to be salvaged and expanded. This meant "rubber wheels" for at least the short haul.

The Fifth Time is the Charm

Metro's new, almost militant spirit of pragmatism marked a dramatic retreat from the idealism of Forward Thrust. Similarly, if Forward Thrust had favored business and political elites in its councils, the new planning process for Metro Transit was populist with a capital "P".

The initial staff consisted of Larry Coffman and DMJM project chief Wally Dela Barre; Coffman recruited Bob Gogerty and Wally Toner to plan and execute an ambitious citizen

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participation program to assess public needs and draw others for the new system, and not coincidentally, build voter support for the final plan. Metro empaneled a 55-member "Transit Liaison Committee," chaired by U of W dean Charles A. Morris, to set general policy while Coffman divided the County into ten planning districts and launched a cycle of five meetings in each to identify service needs and review the details of system design.

Toner stresses that he "was not handed a plan to go out and validate." His mission was to "round up more than the usual suspects" and find out what real and potential transit users wanted. Unlike Forward Thrust, which Toner describes as "an attempt to create a mid-level of leadership between elected officials and the people -- the para-politicians and para-bureaucrats," the new approach to public involvement sought out "perfect voters," i.e., citizens who never missed an election. These voters, whose names and addresses were a matter of public record, were not necessarily the best educated or wealthiest citizens but their political diligence made them unofficial "opinion leaders" in their neighborhoods. "The real genius of the American system," adds Toner, "is that we're all equal in the voting booth."

Metro told Toner not to spare any expense: "After two defeats, they said, we are going to get around the corner." To accomplish this Toner and his assistants, including his then-wife Nea Carroll, combined the techniques of political canvassing with market research. They mailed notices and information to tens of thousands of voters to recruit participants at district meetings ("It's a general rule that citizens will refuse to attend meetings they don't know about," Toner notes).

The first sessions were convened around nitty-gritty issues of how far people were willing to walk to a bus stop and how long they would wait for a bus to come. This data provided the grist for the Transit Liaison Committee and DMJM planners who generated alternative routes, types of service, and schedules, which were then reviewed and modified by participants at follow-up meetings. "Brainstorming around small tables was new back then," Toner explains, and he was impressed by the "metropolitan spirit" of participants. "We hadn't Balkanized yet."

Aubrey Davis, who chaired Metro Council's fledgling Transit Committee at the time, praises the effort as a "classic Seattle participation process. People drew their own bus routes." This horrified some planning and transit professionals. "We didn't know you didn't do things like that," Davis explains. It was a case of "good intentions unburdened by the culture of practice."

Much of the credit for the credibility and success of Metro's transit planning outreach goes to Penelope "Penny" Peabody, who would help guide the agency in many capacities. She was the first woman to direct a Metro department, Public Services which managed most communications activities, and later served as acting Executive Director and as the penultimate chair of the Metro Council.

Thanks to the direct input of some 10,000 citizens between November 1971 and the following April, a plan began to emerge to guide Metro through to the year 1980. The final scheme was reviewed by PSGC, its titular sponsor, and accepted by the Metro Council on July 20, 1972, for submittal to the voters along with a request for the sales tax hike the following September.

The "1980 Plan" marked a departure from previous Forward Thrust efforts in more than its reliance on buses rather than rail. Consciously guided by King County's 1964 Comprehensive Plan, it embraced a "multicenter" concept which targeted 25 routes over 650 miles to serve transit nodes in the University District, Bellevue, and the Duwamish industrial area as well as downtown Seattle.

The plan built on the success of Seattle's "Blue Streak" to propose 25 park-and-ride lots serving 14,000 automobiles along with additional "Freeway Flyer" express routes. It included service on the two transit lanes then planned for a ten-lane I-90 and additional High Occupancy Vehicle lanes (HOV) proposed for other freeways. To navigate congested downtown streets, the plan called for buses to operate in reserved lanes against the flow of auto traffic on Second and Fourth Avenues. These "contra-flow" lanes would later become a source of bitter controversy and help fuel the debate which culminated in the downtown transit tunnel.

Metro promised to replace 300 older vehicles and add 250 new buses, all "employing the best available propulsion source at the time of purchase," which was then presumed to be liquid natural gas. At the same time, it hedged its bets by rejecting a formal proposal to ban the purchase of new diesel buses. For the convenience of passengers, 1,200 shelters and 6,000 new bus stop signs were put into the plan.

The DMJM plan projected total capital costs of \$95.2 million through 1980, including nearly \$8 million to acquire Seattle Transit and Metropolitan Transit Corporation assets. Metro looked to state highway funds to pay for freeway facilities and to UMTA to help finance new

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vehicles and park-and-ride lots. It also hoped to tap into \$50 million in transit bonds as part of Governor Evans' "Washington Futures" program slated for the state ballot in November 1972.

Most ambitious of all, the plan pledged to reach an annual ridership of 54.3 million passengers by 1980, a growth of 80 percent in eight years. It also promised services for the disabled and elderly at fares discounted from a base of 20 cents and 10 cents for each zone. The plan proposed to increase transit routes and total hours of service by half. This commitment more than doubled annual operating costs from \$17.8 million in 1973 to \$36.8 million in 1980. Needed revenues were anticipated in more or less equal thirds from fares, a three-tenths of a percent sales tax, and MVET matching funds.

Metro also committed to expand and modernize Seattle's trackless trolleys (53 were still in operation at the time), despite the misgivings of some transit experts and financial analysts. This concession to trolley enthusiasts did not prevent Metro from picking up an unwelcome passenger on the way to the polls. COMET succeeded in collecting enough signatures to validate an initiative calling for City Light to take over operation of Seattle Transit and rebuild a virtually all-electric system. Initiative No. 1 to "Consolidate Lighting and Transportation Departments" and the Metro proposition for a "Consolidated Public Transportation System" would appear next to each other on Seattle ballots in the September 19, 1972, primary election, which created the potential for enormous, possibly fatal voter confusion.

Seattle voters were not confused on one issue as the election approached: they were fed up with freeways. In a special election on February 8, substantial majorities voted to scrap the Bay Freeway and to revoke bonds for the R.H. Thomson Expressway, which Mayor Uhlman had already erased from the city's comprehensive plan. Freeway foes also filed suit to challenge the adequacy of the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the last miles of 1-90, which threw the project into a long legal twilight zone. This was one of the first such challenges based on the scope and accuracy of an EIS, which had been conceived as an innocuous reform by Senator Henry M. Jackson, sponsor of the original 1970 National Environmental Protection Act.

These new vectors in public attitudes toward transportation did not necessarily threaten the Metro Transit proposition as Seattle attorney Harvey Poll assumed the chair of the Citizens Transit Committee to campaign for adoption using funds left over from Forward Thrust as well as new contributions. Poll later observed, "The idea of a countywide transit system seemed so logical to me that I was surprised to find anyone opposing it. Actually, I feared that apathy would be our

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greatest enemy, but I learned that any plan has its detractors and enemies."

Among these were fiscal conservatives who organized a series of fronts with clever acronyms: CAME (Citizens Against Metro Excess), WENT (Women Enraged over New Taxes), GONE (Grouchy Over New Expenses) and SPENT (Society for Prevention of Excessive Nuisance Taxes). Former Seattle Transit Commissioner John Flaherty gave voice to the misgivings felt by many current transit employees, and COMET necessarily opposed Metro in the course of promoting its plan for City Light to take over Seattle Transit.

The more damaging critique came from the Left, which saw the all-bus plan as worse than half a loaf. Neighborhood and anti-freeway activists such as Margaret Tunks and the Central Seattle Community Council Federation suspected that Metro had formed an unholy alliance with highway interests, and younger radicals such as Nick Licata, distrusted anything that "The Establishment" supported. Organized under the banner of "Unite" ("emphatically not an acronym," according to Licata), Metro's left-wing critics claimed that the plan would subsidize suburban commuters at Seattle's expense (ironically, suburban critics made the opposite charge, and assurances were given that transit service would be proportional to local levels of sales tax support). The Left also attacked the Metro Council as unrepresentative, objected to "having a sewer company run transit," and damned the whole thing as "inequitable, ineffective, and fraudulent." Their alternatives included banning automobiles from downtown Seattle, building "people movers," and laying out new trails so people could commute by bicycle or even horseback.

Rather than rebut these charges and counter proposals, Citizens Transit Committee concentrated on selling the Metro plan on its own merits. Taking a leaf from the 1937 campaign for trackless trolleys, CTC brought in a natural gas-powered "Sunshine Coach" for tours around the County, while elected officials, business leaders and progressive groups such as the Muni League and League of Women Voters took to the stump.

Metro's real advantage was the fact that it had already identified thousands of supporters in the course of its planning meetings. Thanks to Wally Toner, it knew in advance which precincts were most likely to support -- or oppose -- the plan and deployed its volunteers accordingly. The lessons of the 1968 Forward Thrust campaign had been learned well.

For all of this, no one knew if voters would raise their own taxes while they were still

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climbing out of the aerospace depression. County Executive John Spellman and Jim Ellis conferred quietly before the election and agreed that King County should take over the transit system if the Metro proposition failed. Spellman also suggested that it might be time for the County to assume Metro's water quality functions as well, but this idea was rebuffed.

Metro's advocacy for its 1980 plan proved so successful, in fact, that many voters were surprised on September 19 to find that they were also being asked to raise their own sales tax. This technicality had been eclipsed in the debate over the adequacy of the all-bus plan. Sticker-shock did not prevent 115,000 voters from buying Metro Transit, while 80,000 turned it down. Any confusion over the COMET initiative also did not prevent Seattle voters from rejecting it by 69,000 votes to 27,000.

After three unsuccessful tries in a decade, Metro was finally in the transit business. Now it had only 103 days to get ready to start carrying passengers on January 1, 1973.

Getting Rolling

"The 100 Days" drive to prepare for transit operations is now the stuff of Metro legend. Despite all the planning leading up to the election, a million details remained to be settled. The responsibility fell chiefly on the shoulders of Metro Executive Director C.V. Tom Gibbs, Metro Council Chair C. Carey Donworth, Metro Transit Committee Chair Aubrey Davis, Jr. (then Mayor of Mercer Island), and Transit Planning Director Larry Coffman, while a national search was launched to find a Transit Director.

Contracts had to be negotiated to acquire the facilities and rolling stock of Seattle Transit and Metropolitan Transit. The former did not go entirely smoothly as representatives of the two governments talked every evening from 6 pm to midnight and most weekends through that fall and winter. Metro rejected Seattle's offer to run the system for a year while Metro got its act together, but the City also needed time to work out some peculiar complications of its own. Because Seattle Transit's assets were actually owned by the utility's fare-payers, not the City Government, officials had to go through an additional hoop to acquire and then dispose of the system. Things got even dicier at one point when then-City Councilmember Tim Hill proposed that City Light power the trolleys at no charge. The idea which was quickly squelched by his City colleagues (although Seattle would return much of its transit sale proceeds to Metro to help finance

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rehabilitation and expansion of the trolley system).

City Budget Director R.W. "Woody" Wilkinson, Jr. recalls that the talks were further complicated when Metro's appraisal of Seattle Transit facilities and equipment came in higher than the City's own estimate. Wilkinson credits Jim Ellis with cutting the Gordian Knot. "He said, let's split the difference." The final agreement included a pledge by Seattle to spend its \$6.5 purchase price on transit-related improvements.

Interim contracts also had to be negotiated with the workers of the two former bus systems, which were represented by independent (and not entirely fraternal) ATU locals. Seattle Transit workers particularly resented the fact that Metropolitan Transit employees (many of whom had been discharged by Seattle) were granted seniority and pension rights equal to their own. Ironically, Metro was obligated to retain former transit workers in "comparable positions" by amendments to Metro's organic law adopted at the insistence of organized labor in 1957 and 1965. Federal law also required labor's blessing for the new system to qualify for UMTA funds.

In addition to bad blood between the employees of the two systems, there was the larger problem of integrating two very different institutional cultures. Before absorbing transit, Metro numbered just 248 employees, mostly engineers and technicians who prided themselves on being the cream of the technocratic crop. Suddenly, Metro's ranks swelled with more than 1,100 new workers -- mostly Seattle Transit drivers and mechanics. They were no less proud than their Metro counterparts, but in a different way. Seattle Transit had been run with an almost military esprit de corps and precision, and its ranks had no particular respect for their new Metro commanders. As Chuck Collins, then an aide to County Executive John Spellman, puts it: "One day the ant woke up and discovered it had swallowed an elephant."

Many credit Ed Rafter with helping the ant survive the ordeal. A veteran of the Seattle Transit System, Rafter came over to Metro as chief of transit operations, a post he occupied until his retirement in 1979. Daniel Linville, a young driver at the time and now president of ATU Local 587, remembers Rafter as "hard taskmaster who cut no slack" but was universally respected. Because Rafter was a former ATU business agent, some joked that Metro had hired him to avoid facing him across the bargaining table.

While Metro and transit workers sized each other up, routes had to be planned and schedules had to be devised. Metro also scrambled to prepare an application to UMTA for \$4.5